United Nations

Press Release

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General expresses regret for Iraqi missile attack last night on Tel Aviv.

- Security Council President receives letters from members of military coalition informing him of Wednesday evening's attack against Iraq.

- United Nations agencies report of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing into Jordan as they continue to co-ordinate efforts to meet humanitarian needs of people affected by war in Persian Gulf.

- Amendment Conference concludes; authorizes its President to hold further consultations on a comprehensive test ban.

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Following the attack last night by Iraqi missiles on Tel Aviv, Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar this morning expressed regret that the attacks were spreading the conflict, since Israel was not part of the coalition. The Secretary-General also deplored the fact that the targets were civilian.

Asked by correspondents, on his arrival at United Nations Headquarters, what his message to Israel would be, the Secretary-General replied that he expected Israel to be as patient as possible.

To a question about last night's attack on Saudi Arabia, Mr. Perez de Cuellar said that at least Saudia Arabia was part of the coalition; but as Secretary-General of the United Nations, he was not pleased to see hostilities around the world. He reiterated that the hostilities against Iraq came within the framework of the Security Council resolutions.

Asked if he still had contacts with the Iraqi authorities, the Secretary-General said he had not been in contact with the Iraqi Ambassador in the last two days. Neither had he been in contact with Israeli authorities.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

The Secretary-General's Spokesman announced at the noon briefing that the Ambassadors of the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) had met, at their request, with the Secretary-General to discuss the humanitarian aspects of the Gulf crisis. They had also discussed the Nordic proposal to dispatch a peace-keeping force to Kuwait if Iraq withdraws from that country.

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A United Nations official told correspondents at Headquarters today that the President of the Security Council, Bagbeni Adeito Nzengeya of Zaire, was holding bilateral meetings with Council members, although no formal session of the whole Council was envisaged for the time being. The subject of those bilateral meetings was a general exchange on the situation in the Persian Gulf.

The official said the President had asked members of the military coalition against Iraq to keep him and the Council informed and had received letters from the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as well as from other countries participants in the coalition.

Among the letters made available as documents, one dated 17 January, from the French Ambassador, Pierre-Louis Blanc, said the military action on Wednesday evening had been initiated to fulfil commitments made jointly with France's allies to secure implementation of Security Council resolutions and had no other objective than that of liberating Kuwait.

In a similar letter, the British Ambassador, Sir David H.A. Hannay, said the military action initiated Wednesday by the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and France was designed to "achieve the liberation of Kuwait called for in the Security Council resolutions, and not the destruction, occupation or dismemberment of Iraq". He expressed hope that the actions would be concluded as soon as possible.

The Ambassador of Kuwait, Mohammad A. Abulhasan, informed the Council President in his letter that Kuwait was exercising its right to self-defence and to the restoration of its rights. Among those were, first and foremost, the recovery of Kuwaiti territories, occupied by Iraq since 2 August last year.

In other communications, the Soviet Union has informed the United Nations of its last-minute efforts to avert hostilities in the Gulf. In a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 17 January, the Soviet Ambassador referred to a statement by President Mikhail Gorbachev who said that after being informed by the United States Administration of its decision to begin military operations, he had proposed that President George Bush should contact Saddam Hussein directly, about the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. The Soviet Ambassador in Baghdad had been instructed to advise the Iraqi President of that proposal. In a television statement, President Gorbachev had expressed the hope that, guided by the higher interests of his people and of the world community, Saddam Hussein would take that path as the only way out.

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United Nations agencies are continuing to co-ordinate efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of people affected by the war in the Gulf.

A United Nations official said in Geneva today that the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) had reported that an influx of tens of thousands of people had started to come into Jordan.

In addition, UNDRO reported of a massive displacement of people within Turkey, who were moving away from the border with Iraq to the centre of the country. No influx of people into Syria had been reported. There were reports of Iraqis fleeing into Iran on the north and eastern border to avoid the battlefield. UNDRO relief officials stressed that the situation was in such a state of flux, that the numbers were changing rapidly. The agency has prepared an emergency Plan of Action to assist those fleeing into the four countries neighbouring Iraq and Kuwait.

In a related development, the World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that requests for assistance for evacuees crossing into Jordan, Syria, Turkey and Iran have now increased. The agency has actively provided health assistance to those four countries since the beginning of the Gulf crisis and the first influx of evacuees.

In a communique issued at WHO headquarters, the agency estimated that the overall start-up costs of dealing with the health problems of the increasing number of evacuees would amount to some $2.4 million.

The agency further reported that a task force to monitor and assess the situation as it develops in the Gulf had been set up by its Director-General, Hiroshi Nakajima. The force consisted of WHO experts on chemical safety and toxicology, sanitation and water supply and transmittable diseases, among other things.

All relief efforts, the agency said, were carried out in close collaboration with UNDRO.

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The Amendment Conference on the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water -- also known as the partial test-ban Treaty -- concluded its work tonight by adopting a decision mandating its President to conduct consultations with a view to achieving progress towards a comprehensive test ban and to resuming the work of the Conference at "an appropriate time". The vote on the decision was 74 in favour to 2 against (United Kingdom, United States), with 19 abstentions.

In its decision, the Conference said it acknowledged the "complex and complicated nature of certain aspects of a comprehensive test-ban treaty, especially those with regard to verification of compliance and possible sanctions against non-compliance."

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